

Ash on

WISHBONE ASH: a collection of boring old farts, or living proof that straight, no-nonsense rock music is very much alive and kicking?

Recently, they played Sheffield, no longer a city of steel, but one where concrete has taken over. The centre is grey and monotonous, consisting of shopping precincts and subways, and on a cold, damp, foggy October evening it's like a set from a low-budget science fiction movie — a place that human beings left centuries ago.

But Wishbone Ash fans obviously stayed behind. After the Motors had received a less than ecstatic reception from a half-full City Hall, the place was buzzing within minutes of their leaving the stage. The bar had emptied. After seconds of Wishbone's first number half of them had left their seats, never to return, and for the next hour and a half the band played to a seething sea of heads, arms and legs.

"Gigs in the north of England and Scotland are always more of an outburst than in the South," says bassist and lead singer Martin Turner. "The people are more working class, more gritty, particularly Glasgow, which always reminds me of the Bronx in New York."

They had been in Germany and France for five weeks before coming to Britain, and after the end of the UK tour they go back to America (where they all live) and start a tour in the Midwest with Robin Trower.

Wishbone obviously still

by
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have a massive following in Britain (the current tour is sold out) so why have they opted to live in the US?

"One of the reasons is that it's much easier to arrange the technical side of things over there," Turner explains.

"There are more facilities for recording, buying equipment, getting road managers. Criteria Studios (where the new album "Front Page News" was recorded) really 'put themselves out for us.'

"But I've never been into it as much as the others. Tax is another reason, but that doesn't mean much to me. It's a beautiful area (New England), but it's the sort of place I'd like to live in 20 years' time. When I get back to London, I realise what I'm missing.

"The reason we went there was to try and relax after all the hassles we had with the break-up with Miles Copeland (Wishbone's former manager, now involved with punk rock labels Step Forward and Illegal).

The break-up with Copeland, which was associated with financial problems, was a crisis as much for the band as it was for him. They say their records were affected.

"We're not a real session-type band. We need to mess around at times in the studio and start recording when we actually feel like making some music, not simply because we're in the studio with a schedule to keep to. 'Wishbone Four', 'There's The Rub' and 'Locked In'

were all made almost against the clock, and when Miles left we decided to take our time over things.

"It might be naive, it's expensive, and we might make assholes of ourselves — that's what we thought at the time — but we felt we'd at least be doing it on our own terms."

The last album, "New England", was recorded under much more sympathetic conditions, in the basement of the band's headquarters in Connecticut.

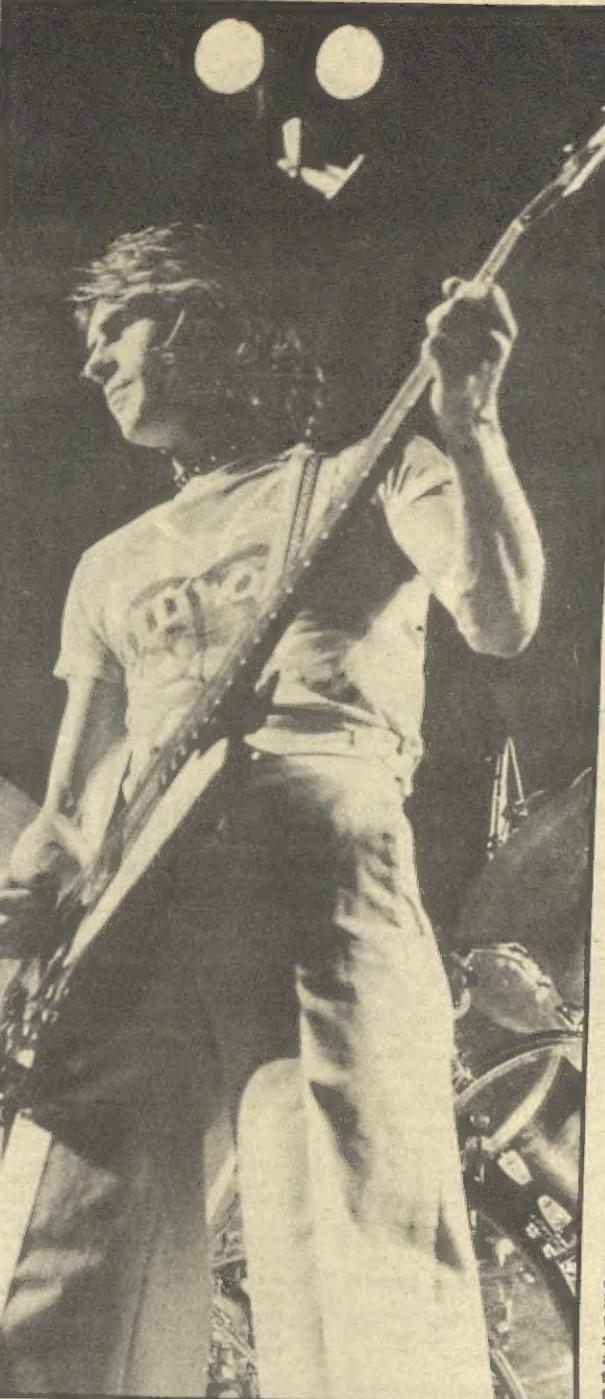
"It was almost like recording live. The whole thing was one big jam session, and most of the time we were hardly aware that the stuff we were playing was being recorded. I really enjoyed working that way, but you obviously lose some of the technical quality that you get from a studio."

As well as the conditions under which some of the group's albums were recorded, Martin had reservations about some of the producers they had used.

"Tom Dowd (who produced 'Locked In') is a beautiful guy, but he was totally wrong for us. Ron and Howie Albert (producers of 'Front Page News') are both great guys again, but with all due respect they're conventional music producers, and I don't think we were really talking the same language."

Had the band considered producing their albums themselves?

"I think it creates more problems than it solves with a band. If it was just me going into the studio, I'd certainly do it, and you could be a lot more radical and adventurous, maybe. But with a band, you get each member wanting his own way and the whole thing gets fragmented. We're already putting a lot of energy into writing and



MARTIN TURNER: 'We had a very lackadaisical attitude to our records in the past, which was a bit naughty.'

fire!

performing the songs, and I just don't think it works."

Wishbone Ash released their first official single a few weeks ago, a track from the new album written by Laurie Wisefield called "Goodbye Baby Hello Friend".

It's an obviously more commercial sound from the band that produced "Phoenix", but with a melody that sticks in your head whether you want it to or not, it must have a good chance of being a hit.

So why has it taken them seven years to decide to release a single?

"I think we have had a very lackadaisical attitude towards our records in the past, which was a bit naughty of us. We've just let the record company deal with that sort of thing, but now we've started to pay more attention to what we're doing.

"There's definitely been a swing in the band's creative talents. When we first started we were very young and naive and we had quite a lot of success before we were ready for it. We were still experimenting, which is what you tend to do when you're still a semi-pro band, but we did it publicly. I think now we've got down to playing what we're really interested in."

"We could have split up a couple of years ago and all gone our separate ways, which is what so many bands have done. But we didn't, probably because of the sort of people we are. Steve and I have been together since three years before Wishbone started. Our natures are just abrasive enough to spark things off without going too far."

At the Sheffield concert the band played only three tracks from their new album,

although it was obvious that people were only too glad to listen to familiar material, particularly songs like "Phoenix", which Wishbone didn't play on their last UK tour.

"We decided to play a lot of old songs that we hadn't done live for ages, rather than play the whole of the new album. We've done that in the past, but it's very ambitious if people don't know the material, and the new album is quite studio-oriented, with orchestration on some tracks."

After the end of the concert, all four members of the band spent a good half-hour meeting fans who had waited at the stage door for them, signing posters, pictures, arms, legs, etc. They apparently do it after every concert, with a friendliness that must be untypical of most bands.

"We've always done it. I think it's important to keep in touch with 'normal' people, and it's amazing how much you learn from them."

All right, that sounds patronising, but rock musicians get stuck on pedestals whether they like it or not, and Wishbone Ash do genuinely try to communicate with the people they're playing for.

"It probably breaks up the stardom thing a bit, when people actually see what you're like. But people come up and tell us how much a particular song has meant to them because of what was happening to them at the time, and I love that, it's really spontaneous."

"It's very much a British trait. There's something about the Americans and the Germans which makes it impossible to really get through to them. That's why I'd rather live in England than anywhere else. It's home."